1973

Oral History Interview: Martin A. Perry

Martin A. Perry

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Date November 24, 1973

Martin A. Perry
(Signature - Interviewee)

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Date November 24, 1973

This is an interview with Martin Perry. He is fifty-nine years old. He lives in Westover, W. Va. Mr. Perry is a section boss for the Consol Coal Company. He works at Osage Mine No. 3. In this interview Mr. Perry describes early coal mining in West Virginia.

Where were you born? Elk Ridge in Fayette County, West Virginia. June 13, 1914.

How many people were in your farily? My mother had thirteen kids, but she raised ten.

When did you move from Fayette County? 1919 to Morgantown. Where at in Morgantown? Bertha Hill, a coal mining camp.

How old were you when you started working in the mines? Eighteen years old.

Why did you start so early? Well, the depression was on and my dad woeked at the mines, and he had a place by himself and they put a buddy on with him. He said if you were going to put a buddy on with him, he would take his son in.

How lond did you work with your dad in the mines? About three months. We hand loaded coal with a shovel and dug with a pick, and we used black powder to shoot and a squib. And we used carbide lights.

What's a squib? That ignites the black powder. You light the squib with your carbide light and it ignites the powder.

Was that independent coal company that you worked for or just your dad or what? No, it was a Curt Flut Coal Company. They had four mines at Scotts Run. They laid all the single men off and I got a job at a mine where they used ponies and horses, and I got a job dumping coal there riding on a rope haul. You had to shift the rope in the wheels as you rode the back of the trip down the tipple. Then I got a job driving, string team in the mine, three ponies. I worked there fifteen months, as I remember. Then both the mines was shut down from 1930-1934. I got a job there to help clean the mine out and lay the new tracks. Then when they started to run coal I got a break. I started braking on a mainline loader. I was braking for about three months, and I started running the motor. I thought I was a big wheel then. Twenty years old and running a mainline motor. I went from a main line loader to running a loading machine. That was big money in them days. They paid $6.20 a day in 1935 to run a loading machine.

When you started with your dad, how much did you make? We was loading coal for $.22½ a ton.

You just got paid for the coal, you didn't get paid for anything else? No. Then you had draw slate. It was twenty-four inches thick, and you wedged it down and threw it back behind you.

You didn't get paid for the work that you did. You didn't get paid for setting posts or timber either. Now today the hand loaders get about $2.00 a ton loading that plus they get portal pay. They'll get $13.00 or $14.00 a day without loading any coal.

When you first started was the mine tall enough to walk in? No, I worked strictly coal. What they call a strictly vein. We had about 4½' high.

When you mined how much slag or extra, did you take out? Did you just take the coal? We loaded the coal in the cars and throwed the slate back. We made it look like a stone fence. Put it up to look like it was laid with cement and everything. Made it look pretty.

You mean you put the slate right back in the mine? Yeah, along the walls.

How did you pull the cars out? Did they have horses or did you pull it by hand or what? No, they had motors there. They had small eight ton motors with a cable on them. After you run out of trolley wire you use a three hundred foot cable to reach the cars, four ton cars, we loaded eighty ton of coal one day. Two of us. That's a lot of coal to load. You couldn't do that too many days. We averaged around fifty ton a day. Two of us. Then when we started running a loader or braking it was $5.00 a day. That was 1935. This hand loading was back in 1932. And the day man, the motorman at that time, got $2.70 a day. But when I started running a motor, I got $5.00 a day. That was big money then in 1935.

That was right after the depression? Yes. Then I run motor fifteen years in between. I run loading machines and up bostextry. I hung trolley wire and I was on production all of forty-one years I worked in the mine, except three months I hung trolley wire during the war.

What did you do when you hung trolley wire? You just hung the wire. You drill the holes u p in the roof and put your hangers in. You put a 6" hole in the roof and you--and the hanger had expand on it and you tighten up and that would make the hanger tighter. You drill that with a hand auger. Today they have electric drills for that.

Then I start ed bossing in 1946 steady. But I bossed from 1941-1946 off and on. I didn't want to boss. I made easier money running motor.

What do you have to do to become a section boss? You have to take a test. You have to have a mine foreman's test. About fourteen hundred questions. Then you have oral work to go with it. It takes you two days.

Do you have to have so many years in the mines first? At that time five years in or around the mines. Today I think it's

three years. Then I got a job at the mine at Bertha Hill. Shut down in 1952. Then I got a job at Osade Christopher Coal Company. And I bossed extra there for three years on account of they were cutting back and laid off some. So I started bossing in 1955 steady there.

When they used to use the teams in the mines to pull the cars out, did they leave the horses in the mines? Did they stable them in the mines or outside? No, our mines we brought outside. Now shaft mine you leave them in. Vacation come and you took them out for two weeks and then the after strike brought them out on the weekends. But ours come out every night.

Were you in the mines when the unions came in? When they had all the disputes? Yeah, I was in the mine. I joined the union in 1930 when I was going to high school.

Did you work and go to school both? No. I did in 1935. I worked from 2:30 to 9:00 0' clock in the evening and I went to school then for a while my junior year in high school. T hat was too rough.

Today's mining, the first step I worked in the mine was loading coal. By shovel and pick. The the mines got advanced to mechanical mining. That's having a loading machine. You have a cutting machine to cut the coal and you blast the coal. Then you load it out of the loading machine.

Then your next step was on rubber tire. You had same equipment, no tracks. They put rubber tire on the machines and caterpillars. Then the next step was one machine done it all. You didn't blast any more coal or drill or anything. You had a continour miner. You have a riper type machine. It cut from bottom up. Then you have a healie miner that you cut from the top down. Then you have a borin machine it boardical and across the top of it-- it was five feet across flat. Then you had your oval on the sides and your bottom would come into ten feet. It made it look like a tunnel. Really nice mining.

When you first started how many hours did you work in the mine? Seven hours a day. But you were there eight and a half hours a day. you didn't get portal time. You didn't get paid your dinner hour. Today you get portal and dinner hour. From the time you leave outside mine and come back it's eight hours.

When you first started, did you have to walk in? Did they have any transportation in? You walked in. No transportation.

Did you ever have any falls or anything? Yes, you have falls on the main line and then you clean the falls up and tever it. Today they have arches that they put in and holds the top up better and everything. But the main line today is they're all in good shape. They have bigger tracks and of course they have bigger motors too. They have 50 ton motors hauling coal out of the mine today.

Back in my time when you run a 15 ton you thought you was running a big motor or a 10 ton.

When you first started, did you have to furnish your own pick and shovel? Yes. You had to use you own tools and buy your own powder and caps and squiles.

Did they pay you in script? You mean script out of the store. When you got your pay, did they pay you in script? No, they paid you in cash. I thought some companies used to pay you in script. No, you can take script out if you want to buy groceries or anything at the company store. Thats what the script was about. Then later on they started paying you in cash on account of too many hold ups. They would hold a bank roll up. Brought the cash money to the office while they held them up. Back in them days it was pretty rough.

Today's mining is easier today than it was twenty or twenty-five years ago. But its steadier work. You're on the go all day long. When they used to lay tracks and timber. You laid the place up and timbered it. You could wait until the next one was cleaned up with a loading machine. Now today you're on the go and they went and timbered to roof bolts to hold the top of them.

They don't use timbers in the mines anymore? Only where they have to. They use I beams. They don't use timbers. If its on a main line they put I beams up. And if its a secondary haulage where its not going to be in there too long, they use wooden cross wires. They drill holes in the roof and anchor them I beams up with roof bolts. Now some part of our mine where we work at, they use 7' bolts, some place a 9' bolt.

When you first started and had to put the timbers up, did you have to cut the timbers or did they supply the timbers? We would use timber hand loading if you didn't drive a place too wide. Not over 10' or 12' wide and you just sit a row of posts. You put them up yourself.

Do you sit a post here like this and a post here and put the timbers across? Yeah, you laid your own track when you hand loaded and you shot your own coal. You had to drill two holes in the place, sometimes three. You drill one hole and you mined it all the way back. They call that the breaker shot when you hand load it. When you mined on back there you shoot your other one all the coal will just roll out nice. Nice lumps and everything. You couldn't shoot two shots at once because you had to have clearance for your next shot. Let the shot move.

When you bored the hold, did you use a hand auger? We used a hand auger only it was called a breast auger. You had a plate you put on your breast and had a thing out on it like a funnel and you stuck auger in it and you had a crank and you cranked here. Some augers had a double crank and some had a single.

How deep did you have to drill in the coal? You didn't drill as deep as your cut was. If your cut was 6' deep, you went in there about 5½'. You couldn't drill past where the cut was. It was beyond the solid coal in the shoot.

You would have to make a cut on top of a cut on the bottom and drill, then shoot? No, you cut it on the bottom back in them days. Then drill and shoot it. Today they got a machine and you can write your name in the coal with it.

When you went to school at Bertha Hill, did you go to a one room school? No, we had a big mining camp. They had four rooms of school. Then they had a Catholic school and a colored school at that mining camp.

Was the mine segregated? Did the coloreds and the whites work together in the mines? We didn't have too many colored. They didn't live there in 1919 to 1925. They wouldn't allow them to live there in that mining camp. But a few of them worked. There was very few. The colored men took care of sanitation.

Did they have anything like a section boss where you first started, or you just worked on your own? No, we had a boss that visited you one time a day. Them days you had four or five hundred men working in the mines and you don't have a mine foreman and two assistants. Now some days they came and some days they didn't.

Did you keep track of how much coal you mined yourself so you can get paid if you got paid by the ton, or who did that? They hung a weigh sheet. They had a union check weighman and a company checkman. They hung the sheet out where you could go check yourself at the pit mouth.

Everytime you brought one out did you check it off, or they check it for you or what? You put the check on the car that you loaded. Then it would show up on the sheet. A lot of times your car would get lost in a wreck or something, have a big wreck and unload the coal out of. Of course, the company paid you for it. The the motor crew, they marked down how many hours you loaded a day too, then they turned that in. I run the main line motor from 1935 off and on until 1947, I think.

When you run the main line motor, do you pull the cars out of the mine to the tipple? Yes, I pull the cars out of the mine to the tipple and this haul I was on was over a mile on the outside, and when you was coming out of the mine it was so cold you couldn't wait until you got outside. It would get so cold at times, the sand boxes on the motor would sweat in the mines and when you come outside they would freeze and your sand wouldn't run. You have a wreck now and then on account the sand wouldn't run.

What would the sand do? Give it traction. It would sprinkle on the tracks and give it traction to stop you, or if you had a

hard haul you could drop sand and you got traction, the same as a chain on an automobile. You can use a plain tire on an automobile, and you'll spin and go no where and you put the chain on and you move. Thats the way sand plays the same thing with a motor. Then you use the sand for your stop and start. The less sand you can use, the better off you was because you tripped dragging the sand. It would slow your trip up, too, as you pulled. You didn't run sand when you hauled coal in a steady stream. You pull your lead sand value in and out. You leave a little space in between to give the wheel a chance to spin and grab the sand.

Then today they have air brakes on a motor, electric brakes, hydraulic, and a hand brake. Back when I was running the motor all you had was a hand brake.

Did they have anything, any type of a safety program, or anything when you first started? Yes, you had safety program and today I'm a foreman of a mine. I read a safety topic every Monday morning to my men. Then I ask if they have any comments on it. Some do and some don't. Then when they don't ask and they think you're doing something wrong they'll question you about it. So today's mining is rough. With the new laws and production dropping. The section I'm working on today I have bad talk, gas, and mud and water in the section. The machine I boss on is a healy miner, weighs 56 tons. You know you have to block that in your mud. The shuttle cars haul 10 ton of coal and they hang up half the time and you have to build a road out of cross bars and crip blocks and whatever you can get hold of. After you build that, you dump dry coal and pack it down. It makes a pretty good road. Then you have to drill sumps along the roadway to let the water go in the pump and pull it out. If you don't, the water will scatter all over the muggy road.

When you first started, did they have any way to blow air back in the mines, or was they that big? Yes, they had a fan, but they was worked different from what they do today. Today it's exhaust. No today its intake and back in them days exhaust. I remember at this mining camp before they had a fan in it, they used a furnace to pull air out of the mine. Circulate the air. I can remember that just as good as today. I knew the man that fired the furnace. They had a wooden chimney made like a box went up through the ground. It was about 6' square. It was built out of wood so far down then bricks the rest of the way and had a big furnace. It had a place cut out where he wheeled the coal in there and kept that furnace going. The draft would pull the air up and out of the chimney. That's the way they venelated the mine.

Today the mine I work at has four fans and haul coal. My section to the tipple is eleven miles. Wehn they come on a section, pull your coal, the relay motors come to pull your coal. They take it so far, then the main line motor takes it to the outside.

Do they still use, like you said used to string trolley wire cable, do they still use that? We have trolley wire, yes. In the feed line they run parallel. Carry more power. Every so far they have rectafier in the line.

When you first started, were there a lot of people getting killed in the mines like they are today because of falls? Well, the fatalities are less today than they were years ago. The miners are smarter and they didn't have too many safety rules years ago. All you had to do when you mined coal was to set a safety post. Today, as you advance, you use roof bolts.

Did you have any trouble when you used carbide lights of spark, so if you hit a gas pocket or something because a light was just a flame really? It was a flame. Swifty coal doesn't have too much gas in it, but the Pittsburgh seam has more. When you go in virgin coal you got to watch yourself too. Pittsburgh coal is worse than virgin coal.

When you first started was it a slope mine or an incline? It wasn't a shaft mine was it? No, a slope. They only had one shaft mine in Monongali a county. It was swifty coal. The Pisstburgh pulled 90' below it. The mine I'm working in now opened up in 1917. Some people have the impression mine is just a long tunnel. But you've got your main line and there's sections that branches off your main line. Same as going from Bertha Hill to Morgantown. There's four or five other mining camps on the road. That's where your map says you branch off.

When you lived at Bertha Hill, did you buy a lot of your stuff from the company store? Your food and so on? No, we brought our foot at A&P at Osage. But they didn't allow you to go. You had to sneak at night and do it. You went to the store at night. You had to buy a little bit at the company store to make them think you was dealing there. But a lot of the people on the weekends would act like they were going away for the weekend and take suit cases with them and bring their food back in them. You didn't have no job if they knew that. We lived in a mine camp. We didn't buy too much food. We raised chickens and hogs and we had our own cow. We had about two acres of ground we made a garden every year. We didn't have to buy too much.

When you first started, did they work shift work all around the clock or just daytime? No, they hand loaded daytime and you hauled your supplies at night. Maybe some mines would load the empties. Load all the empty mine cars. They had enough to load all the empty mine cars plus take care of your supplies.

You mean in the night time they would bring in timber and stuff that you use? Yes, posts.

Would you do that or would they have another crew come in and do that? They had the regular timber crew. The supply crew like

they have today. Our mine has three sets of supply crews because one set couldn't take care of it. It's too big of a mine. You can't get around. Back in them days you didn't have--all you had to take in was posts and ties and two cross bars. Things are well organized in the mine about this supply business. If you run low on certain stuff, you just order your section plant. Its got posts on it and cap peices and wedges and your roof bolts and oil and grease all in one car. You don't have any powder car. There's only certain days to deliver product powder. Of course, my section doesn't use powder. Just the piller sections use it. That's extracting the coal after they advance the rooms up or the headings. When they extract, they use powder to shoot what they call stumps. They'll split a block and then mine the right side of it out so far, then the left side, and leave a little bit of coal for protection. Keep from falling in plus setting posts and when they get this place finished, they will drills holes in what we call stumps and shoot them out and let them fall in. You let it fall in to take the weight off the coal that you're going to mine next. If you don't, the weight will ride over top and won't fall, just keep squeezing and the weight will ride over your solid coal that you're going to mine. You don't want that.

So really they don't do as much blasting now as they used to? Before they had to blast all the coal? Where they had to mine coal before, they had to blast it. No way you could get it unless you blasted it.

When they laid the rails, did you ever ride the rail in? Did they have a little scooter car or anything that you could put on underneath your leg that would fit on the rail and ride it in. No. Down from your part of the county, where you're from around Charleston, they have those cars. But our mines are high, you don't have to do that. We make fire parstin. On the weekend we have what we call jeeps in the mine. They weigh maybe a ton. Seems to me like they go about 60 miles an hour if she wanted to.

Have you ever been on or around a runaway? I had a lot of runaways of my own. When you were driving? When I was running the motor. Driving they had brakes on all cars. They had to have brakes on cars when you drove in the mines so the cars sitting the hand loaders place, and we put little blocks of wood under the cars. Some had bad brakes; we called that a scotch. Scotching a car; I don't know where they ever got that name, but a little block of wood was scotching a car. Than as time marched on, we used skids under the cars. Run the wheel of the car upon the skid. The skid was about 18" long and there was more surface that touched the wheel than the skid. You have a hard time getting started when you run a car upon a skid. After you get started it was okay. Then when you wanted to stop all you had to do was drop some sand. You didn't have to use the brake on the motor or anything. When the skids hit the sand, they start slowing up. That saves a lot of runaways.

When you drove a team, how did they if you had a car, and you were pulling it with a team, could you just pull one car at a time? No, I pulled six at one time.

If you were going down an incline, how did they get it to stop then? When you went down an incline, you used a rope on the back of a hoist. The rope led them over the head incline. One mine I worked at was so steep we had a hoist inside the mine to pull the cars up so far over the hill and then the horses got hold of it again to bring them on the outside.

But to go down the hill then you had to take the horses off and let it down with a rope, or did you use a motor? Hoist. They didn't have any motor at this mine where they had the horses I worked in. You had four or five drivers in there and then they all brought their coal to the side track then the hoist would pull it to the outside. Then you cut the rope off and waited until the trip passed you and hooked it to the back. That was pretty slick work. It looks like today some of the mines ought to go back to that. To the horse and buggy days. You don't even have a blacksmith to run a coal mine today.

Did the coal mine use to hire blacksmiths? Yes, he got paid through the hand loaders. So many tons. You load so many tons you had to give them about $.35 off of each hand loader a pay. That run into big money. A blacksmith made good money. Plus, he got paid doing company work too. Besides sharpening your pick and augers.

So he got paid on how many tons of coal you took in, he got a commission? Yes. Then the company paid him so much. I know they charged a hand loader for getting their picks sharpened and their augers.

Did you pay the company? They took it out of your pay at the office.

When you went home you took your own pick and shovel and auger with you? No, you left them in your place. Then they had a rack made that you locked them up.

But your tools belonged to you, and you had to pay to get them sharpened? You had to buy your tools from the company. You had to buy everything from the company. You even have to buy your checks that you put on the car. When you quit working and turned your checks in you got your money back.

So they know it was your car? Yeah, they had numbers on them. I remembered my number was 408 when I started in the mines.

The blacksmiths didn't work inside the mines did he? No, he was on the outside. You couldn't hardly have a fire inside the mines. They use torches in the mines today, and the welders, but

they don't allow you to smoke. The reason being you know where you're at with the torchesand your welder and good fresh air. But if you smoke you light a cigarette anywhere, and you wouldn't have any particular place to light it, you just light it anywhere. The return area is a bad place, a lot of people go in the return, where the fresh air comes off the section goes back and you return it to the band. It pulls gas out of the wall of the mine and it picks up gas on the way out. When we used carbide lamps we were allowed to smoke. You had open lights. Now carbide lamps would let you know quicker than anything in the world if your air wasn't any good. It would burn 16% oxygen. Safety lamp put the test gas at twelve saless. The flame would start getting smaller all the time with a carbide light, if the air wasn't good. The first light they used in the mine was as far back as I could read about it, was fish scales, made a light.

Fish scales, how did they do that? I don't know. It reflects some way. I don't think then they used a candle. One man told us they used lightening bugs. Now how would lightening bugs do any good in the winter time. You would have to shut the mine down in the winter time. You couldn't get any light.

I remember that they used oil lights in the mines. It looked like a little coffee pot hung on your cap. It had a flame that had a wick in it. It had a flame and most of the coal miners you saw them days had the top of their cap burnt out. Especially if they were a brakeman or a motorman, the air would hit them and blow them back.

Then they got the carbide lamp. I remember when they started using the carbide lamp at Bertha. Then they got the safety lamp. Now that safety lamp, the battery weighs 5#. Then they got a safety lamp he checks gas with. It weighs about 3#. Hang it on your hip. Now today a boss has a safety lamp for his head. A battery hanger at 5#. Then they got a self rescuer. It was 2¼#. Then they got a methane detector. It weighs about 1#. All of that hanging on you, you look like a lineman of west penn.

You said when you started you worked with your dad, you didn't work with him very long. Did they lay you off? Well, yes, they laid all the single men off. Then they called us back, and I worked another month. Then they wouldn't pay my dad for throwing that draw slate back. We loaded two cuts of coal out. We loaded about thirty-five or forty ton of coal that day, and he put the tools on the last car we loaded and he quit. He said he wasn't going to handle that draw for nothing.

Did he ever go back in? Yes, he went to the same company. He got a job in higher coal. Didn't have any draw slate. Pittsburgh coal doesn't have draw slate. That's how I got this job at a one horse mine. One horse, one man owned that himself. They

didn't have any electricity in this mine at all, only to run the hoist. You undermine the coal yourself. You had a machine to cut it for you. When you cut coal, it makes it shoot easier. It has a chance to give. In this mine you have to mine with a pick.

You just pick it right out of the wall? You pick what you call an undercut. Pick it close to the bottom. You hunt the softest part of the coal and you dig it back about three feet, clear across your pleasurements, 12' wide. You drill short holes and you pot that out. What we call potting it out. You pot the bottom out first then your pot will shoot easier with less powder. You have to watch how you use your powder too. You're especially toward the coal you load.

You have to pay for the powder you use? Yes, you pay for the powder. I think a stick of powder is $.06 and a cap is $.07½ when I load coal. Then I went over in this other mine. But the first of the squibs. I think you got about fifty squibs in a box for $.25. Squibs is just like a fire cracker. You light it and it flies. To begin with, I'll explain this black kind of squib. Your place is undercut and you clean all that fine coal that that machine leaves under there, sometimes theres a ton or two under there. You have a flat shovel with a handle about 10' long so you can reach under there. You couldn't use a regular coal shovel cause it wouldn't get under the cut. Then you drilled your holes and put your powder in your black powder that comes in sticks. It used to be granulated, but they made it in sticks when I worked in the mines. You put a needle in there about 6' long to reach your powder. It was tapered. What we called a copper needle. It would be sharp as an ice pick at the end. You left that in there and you had a tamping stick that had a groove cut in it to lay to top of the needle. You tamped your clay in there. You had to tamp your clay, if you didn't that shoot would blow out. It wouldn't give you any advantage. You tamped it all the way to the outside where you started drilling. Then you pulled your needle out. That left your hole all the way to the powder. Then you lit your squib at the mouth of the hole, and when it would go off it would fly back to the powder and ignite the powder. Sometimes I used to watch and be a long way off and boy what a flame that would make. You're not allowed that today in the mines. I didn't know you had to pay for your own powder.

In other words everything you used you had to pay for? You had to buy everything. I worked at another mine where they had these horses and buggies. Instead of using ties, they give you round posts to lay your track on, and they wouldn't give you half enough spikes to lay your own track and we would shoot crap at night for two or three spikes. A rail, what we call a jumper. A rai is 15' long. A jumper would be a shorter rail than that. We would shoot crap for a jumper, a 4' jumper. That was really bad I'll tell you.

Now they run coal two shifts with the ponies and you know when you get one shift out of a pony you already got the best out of him.

Two shifts, that was too much. I think the humane society got after that outfit when they worked them one shift. The ponies were well fed. They give them their oats. When you ate your dinner, you gave the ponies their dinner too. Put a feed bag on their nose. Let them eat then. Before you fed your ponies there would be rats there by the hundreds, and if you didn't watch your dinner bucket those rats upset that dinner bucket and I mean to tell you, you didn't have anything to eat. There used to be a big water hole there close to where we fed the ponies. Them rats got down there, we would put them in that water. We thought they would drown. First thing you would know--the next day you would see the same rats. We would put one man on this side of the water hole to see where them rats come from. Them rats run right through the water and come up on the other side.

You mean they had a lot of rats in the mines? Yes, they followed the horses. You know you have a drift mouth and you feed the horses hay and your oats. They go after that feed. They stay in there.

Do they just come in from outside? They come in from outside and as you developed your mine the rats would follow and multiply too. I've run over a lot of rats in the mines with motors. A lot of them. They would run on the rail toward you.

How about superstitions? Did they have any old superstitions about the rats or anything in the mines? They claim that where the place is going to fall in there won't be any rats there they leave.

Do they have any other superstitions about women or anything? Maybe women coming in the mines? No, I have never heard that. "I heard they wouldn't let women come in the mines." No, I don't think so.

I've got a lot of nerve in the mines when there is men around me, but when I'm by myself you can hear things you never heard before. I'm a little scared in the mines by myself, but I'll go every place I'm suppose to go. I'll go regardless.

When you make a pillar fall in a mine, you can hear them rats running.

Do they still have them in the mines now? Oh yeah. Some of the men brings scraps of bread to feed the rats. Some men are scared of them. But you get enough rats, they get a man down, it wouldn't be long until he would be dead. I've seen a rat while I was pumping in the mines. I've seen a rat jump up about 3' on top of the motor trying to get my dinner bucket during strike. That's when it's the worst during a strike. There ain't too much to eat in the mines. Well the only food they would get would be what they--course in the old days what they would feed the horses and what the miners would leave. Today they eat paper and especially if there is a little bit of food in the paper, like cake where you leave a little bit of icing an cellophane paper. They lick that off. It

used to make dummies to tamp woles with. It was a piece of paper filled with clay about 1½-inches around and 1' long. They would eat the glue off the paper. You would be on a strike or vacation and come back and all the dummies would have the backing and the glue eat out.

People think its warm in the mines in the summertime. Or coal in cummertime and warm in the winter. Its just like the weather is outside. Its colder in the mines. Some places in the mines it is so cold close to the shaft, it will freeze the water in your dinner bucket. Man can't work comfortable when it's that cold. You ain't going to get much out of a man.

You were talking about that furnace they use. That guy that used to keep the furnace going.

Does the shaft pull the air out? How much air could it pull through? Could it pull enough for a big mine? Well, the limit at that time when they had that furnace, they had a couple hundred hand loaders in the mines. They were tunneling under ground to two hills. You see to take your undermine as you advance. Now like you go in 60' and there's a man driving a place parallel with you. When you go 60' you turn. Say you are all one heading and you turn to the right after 60'. Then the other guy turns left after he gets 60' and you meet. Then your air just goes out to where your ends cut through. When your ends meet, thats as far as your air goes. When when you go up 60' more then you turn again and meet. Back here where you meet before you put a wall in there. That advances your air out to where you met again. As you go every 60', you put a wall in between. That takes the air out. For your airs not scattered all over the mines. You have intake and your return. As you build these walls, you have intake air. Then after it goes past the last open cross cut, where they meet, your air goes in the return and goes toward the fan. You build a block wall, solid blocks they use.

When you were talking about that guy that had that furnace, was it just a straight shaft or straight line or what? They had what they call a main line where one of them took the air in and the other one brought it back out. But they had sections branched off of there and it wasn't too far in the mine. I wasn't over a half a mile.

But that furnace was still big enough to circulate that air? Yes. Then if you still ploot to the out croft, you are not too deep under ground. You know what I mean, the depth, the coal from the surface. They would put another one in. I remember Bertha Hill had two of them in.

Did they build another furnace inside the mine. Yes and then put the chimney up through the roof. They cut an opening from the outside in to the furnace out of bricks and stuff too. It was made like an oven, but it was in there about 60'. That's a long furnace.

Of course, if you walk along side and throw coal on it. I remember that. I remember that when they finished this line, I was bossing. We come to that place where them bricks and that furnace was built. We were close to the outside when we finished this line up and we found a post in there in the coal. Then the men worked there when they opened the mine up. They don't remember ever being an opening over there. How that post got there we don't know. Then you find a peice of slate that looked like a fern, some like a snake, and some like a fish. I had a peice of slate that looked like a fish. I don't know what I ever did with it. I was keeping it, but I don't know whatever become of it.

When you're close to the out crofts, you get peacock coal. About the color of a peacock. It's all colors through it. It's real soft and you hace a bad cough when you have that. You figure when you start seeing that coal, peacock coal, you have a bad cough. You got to watch it and timber it good. When what we call sulphur ball wheres through your coal it's sulphur, and there's nothing that will cut that. You cut it after you grind on it some with bits, like a cutting machine. You hit a sulphur ball, you just have to keep setting bits to get through it. Nothing will cut that straight through. You cut so much of it, then you dull your bit and you set another chain of bits and you start on it again until you get it cut off. Then you leave it out in the sun two or three months, and you can crush it with your hand. They sparkle like gold in the mines, the sulphur ball does. Just look like gold. come from Europe. They would be that old when they come over here and go to school. I went to school with giants: I was a pee wee myself. They would learn. It seemed like they were smart after they got started. The first thing they learned when they come over here was the curse words. They was the first thing they learned. Then they would work. And at that time you only went to school for seven months, and then they would work the other five months. Then they started going to school eight months. I didn't go nine months until I went to high school. Years ago school was out the first day of spring. And it seems like the weather was different then than it is today. We always went swimming the first day of spring. In the fall of the year we couldn't wait until the first frost come. So we could get the chestnuts without climbing the tree. There was a lot of chestnut trees in this mining camp. The mining camp had everything, recreation for the kids, had a baseball team every year. In 1936 Bertha Hill won Monongahalia County Championship in softball. In 1937 they won the baseball championship. A few of the guys got to try out in the big leagues. We had independent football teams. This independent football team we had, was all high school boys. When I went to high school, they didn't have any football teams, we just had basketball, no baseball. We named it Bertha, the company backed the team up. It was the high school kids. We had a pretty good team.

You said some of the baseball players got offers to try for pro teams. Did you ever get any? Yes, I got offers with Boston Red Sox in 1937, but I made more money. They wanted me to try for the farm team. They paid $40.00 a month and board at that time. I was making $75.00 or $80.00 every two weeks running the motor in the coal mines. I was afraid I would get homesick if I left home.

A few of the boys had a tryout and they played minor league ball. But I wouldn't go, couldn't leave mommy. And I played a game of soft ball when I was fifty-one years old. I still think I could play as good as some of these kids today. I used to play in the field and then I relieved pitch. I would come out in the out field into the relief pitch. I throwed two or three balls and that's all I needed to warm up. Your arms only good for so many throws. I never had a sore arm in my life. Today I pass every summer a few times to keep in shape.